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THE METHODIST CHURCH IN

ALASKA . . .

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ALASKA

Alaska, known as Uncle Sam's final frontier, occupies the extreme northwestern corner of the North American continent. On the east it is attached to the Dominion of Canada; on the north is the Arctic Ocean; the southern boundary is the north Pacific Ocean; and on the west the Bering Strait separates Alaska from Soviet Russia. At this point the territory of the United States almost touches the territory of Russia. It is only fifty-six nautical miles from the mainland of Alaska to Russian territory (Siberia), and in the Bering Strait the Little Diomede Island, which is owned by the United States, is only five miles from Big Diomede Island, which is owned by Russia.

Alaska, as its name means, is a "Great Land." If placed on the map of the United States parts of Alaska would touch the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans and both Canada and Mexico. It has a total area of 586,400 square miles.

Washed on three sides by waters of the oceans, Alaska has a shore line of vast extent and rugged character. A large number of important islands constitute a part of its area. Extending southward and westward from its mainland is the long Aleutian Peninsula, the extreme western tip of which is broken into an archipelago known as the Aleutian Islands, which are inhabited by a branch of the Eskimo race called Aleuts. There are four major groups of these islands, namely: the Fox, Andreanof, Near, and Rat Islands. One of the Fox group is Unalaska Island, on which is the village of Unalaska, important as a coaling and wireless station.

There are three well-defined geographical areas in Alaska: (1) the Pacific slopes—mountainous, with cool summers, mild winters, covered with heavy forests and other vegetation; (2) the great interior, or central, region of rolling highland country, with a long cold winter and a short hot summer which has long growing hours because of the long days; (3) the Arctic region, which lies north of the Arctic Circle, has a growing season of less than 40 days and a sparse and stunted vegetation.

Agriculture is carried on in the coastal areas and the interior, but its development is limited to local consumption. The prosperity of Alaska is due to its fisheries, minerals, and furs. Gold was discovered in the Yukon country on the border of Alaska and Canada in 1897, resulting in the great Klondike gold rush. Alaska has produced approximately $300,000,000 in gold and half as much in copper. It has exported to the United States products worth $1,700,000,000. The salmon catch of Alaska is half that of the entire world and employs about 25,000 people.

Between 1892 and 1902 the United States imported herds of reindeer from Siberia. There are now nearly a million reindeer in Alaska. The raising of these animals is reserved by law to the Eskimo people, who use them for food, domestic purposes, and to some degree for export in the form of meat. In the 70's there was a controversy between Great Britain, Japan, Russia, and the United States over the indiscriminate killing of seals in the waters of Alaska. The treaty signed in 1911 prohibited pelagic sealing and gave the United States the right to supervise the fisheries. The herds of seals have increased rapidly.

Though large in area, Alaska is sparsely settled. The population is estimated at 73,000, which represents an increase of nearly 14,000 in the last ten years. Juneau, the capital, has 5,700 people; Ketchikan, 4,600; Anchorage, 3,500; Fairbanks, 3,300; and Sitka, the former capital, 2,000. The city of Nome was founded during the gold rush of 1898 and had a population of 18,000 in 1900. It was almost completely destroyed by fire in 1934 and at the present time has a population of around 2,000.

United States defense operations are expected to multiply the population at certain points in Alaska, thereby bringing new problems and needs. Anchorage is an important center in these plans; a population of 10,000 or more military men and families are in prospect and Anchorage will probably be much larger than Juneau. Great naval bases are being developed on Kodiak Island and at Unalaska also.

The population of Alaska is about equally divided between natives and whites. The native population is made up of

Eskimos, including the Aleuts and Indians. The Eskimos (the name comes from an Indian name meaning "eaters of raw meat") are entirely distinct from Indians and the Asiatic tribes, though they belong to the Mongolian race. Their history is not certainly known. They live chiefly on seals and other sea animals and hunt the caribou and fish in fresh waters during the summer. They are thus seasonal nomads, living in skin tents during the summer and in partly subterranean huts of driftwood, turf, and stone during the winter. The well-known igloo is a temporary house made of snow and ice and is not found among the Eskimos of Alaska. These people have a high mentality and have shown great ingenuity in their development of needle work and bone and ivory carving. Because of their small numbers and great isolation they have developed no highly organized social life. They accumulate little or no property and live semi-communistically. The Eskimos are known among the whites who have contacted them as hospitable, generous, and honest people. They have contracted epidemics of the white man's diseases and, being without medical care, large numbers have perished.

The Indians in Alaska belong to the Athapascan, Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian tribes.

The native religion of these Eskimos and Indians of Alaska is of a crude and primitive nature similar to that of the American Indians. It includes the idea of the totem, or the mystical relationship between the individual and some animal, plant, or inanimate object. The picturesque and elaborately painted totem poles which the aboriginal peoples of the northwest set up before their dwellings are well known to travelers. According to this faith each person has a particular totem. He may be descended from this totem, or both may be descended from the same ancestors. Eating or killing the totem may be tabu and marriage within the totem kin is often prohibited. The primitive religion is disappearing as the natives are being Christianized.

This section of the world was discovered by Vitus Joanssen Bering, a Dane who carried on explorations under Russian auspices in 1728. The Strait between Alaska and Russian territory bears his name. Other Russians made explorations and established a fur trading center there.

In 1778 Captain Cook, of the British Navy, navigated these waters and discovered Cook's Inlet. Settlements were made mainly by Russians and it became Russian territory. It was a liability rather than an asset, however, and in 1867 the United States purchased the whole of Alaska from Russia for the sum of $7,200,000. It has the status of a Territory. The governor and the judges are appointed by the President of the United States, and there is a legislature elected by the people.

Education has made progress in Alaska, although the territorial school system was not established until 1917. Previously all schools in Alaska were under the direct control of the Bureau of Education in Washington. After 1917 only schools for natives were left under the Bureau's supervision, and in 1931 these were transferred to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. There are about 2,000 pupils in these schools—most of which are in isolated native villages. There are 12 high schools. The Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines at Fairbanks was opened in 1922.

Methodism in Alaska

Methodist missionary activities began on the Shumagin Islands in 1886 and since that time it has spread to the other important centers throughout the country. There is an Alaska Mission with the following parishes: Ketchikan Parish, Juneau Parish, Seward Parish, Cook Inlet Parish, Shumagin Islands Parish, Unalaska Parish, Bristol Bay Parish, and Nome Parish. Certain of these parishes include several villages and points of work. There are ten Methodist Churches in Alaska and at several points Methodism co-operates in interdenominational projects.

In Ketchikan The Methodist Church is self-supporting and is developing quite rapidly. In Juneau, the capital and educational and mining center of the territory, the church has recently been rebuilt and faces an important opportunity. At Unga and other points building enterprises are under way or in prospect. The large parish in the Shumagin Islands includes a dozen or more villages. This is an important fishing area in which six salmon canneries are located.

The most important center of Methodist work in Alaska

is Seward. Here is located the Jesse Lee Home, a noted school and orphanage, and the Seward General Hospital. In Nome is the Maynard-Columbus Hospital.

Institutions

Seward
Jesse Lee Home
Seward General Hospital

Nome
Maynard-Columbus Hospital

Missionary Workers

Jesse Lee Home, Seward
Mr. Harold Newton, *Superintendent*
Mrs. Harold Newton
Miss Edna Jones, Girls' Matron, Sewing
Mr. Byron Tharp, Farm Superintendent, Boys' Worker
Mrs. Byron Tharp
Mr. Leland Dellinger, Farm Worker
Mrs. Leland Dellinger
Miss Anna Gould, Dietitian
Mr. Thomas Howell, Engineer
Mrs. Thomas Howell, Girls' Matron
Miss Bertha McGee
Mr. Charles Sweet
Mrs. Charles Sweet
Miss Mary G. Hunter
Miss Naomi Cager

Seward General Hospital, Seward
Miss Elizabeth Geijsbeek, *Superintendent*
Miss Ruth Murrell, R.N.
Miss L. Lubin, R.N.
Miss A. Bennett, R.N.
Miss G. Ogden, R.N.
Miss L. Strieble, R.N.
Miss E. Walters, R.N.
Miss J. Davis, Stenographer

Maynard-Columbus Hospital, Nome
Dr. Thomas Morcom, *Superintendent*
Miss Clara Englebretson, R.N.
Miss L. Jean Hilchey, R.N.
Miss Dorothy Faulkner, R.N.
Miss Clara Kuhlman, R.N.

Status of the Church

Number of charges	9	Value of Parsonages	$33,550
Number of churches	10	Sunday schools	14
Church members	686	Enrollment	1,095
Number of Preaching Places	21	Amount raised on the field	$14,101
Church buildings	10	Missionary appropriations	$27,777
Value of church buildings	$219,000	Other money raised in the States	$1,800
Parsonages	9		

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